

Notes on John 20

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The Resurrection — Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20 & 21

The Women Visit the Tomb — Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18

Note on the accounts of the resurrection:

The accounts of the resurrection constitute testimony from various witnesses about what they saw and personally witnessed. As with other testimony, each witness tells what he/she saw, and each may omit things described by others.

This does not mean there is a contradiction, but only that God is accomplishing the very purpose for which witnesses are called to testify to any historical event. The intent is to give the viewpoints of several different individuals. The result is a complete account of all we need to know about what happened. Sufficient detail is given to make sure the testimony is conclusive. With the accounts of several witnesses we have the kind of evidence accepted by both God and man in historical testimony (cf. John 8:17).

The writers never claim that every detail is stated in its exact chronological sequence. As a matter of standard procedure, historians rarely record all events exactly chronologically. Rather, the writer will follow a particular person or series of events in one place or circumstance, then he will move to follow another person or series of events elsewhere. This generally requires an overlap of time with flashbacks, etc.

Furthermore, this was a time of great excitement, confusion, and even disorder. Many events happened simultaneously, or people may have even acted in disarray and disorder. But when events happen simultaneously or overlap, only one can be recorded at a time. And when people act in disorderly ways, there is no way that an account will seem orderly.

Note specifically that the writer John was either a personal eyewitness to every event recorded in these chapters, or else he received an account directly and personally from those who were eyewitnesses. This is not legend or myth recorded many generations later, nor was it passed through many people till it was written. The man who writes is one who personally was present or else had personal firsthand testimony given to him by those who were present.

Verse 1

1. Who came to the tomb (v1), and when did she come? According to other accounts, who also came and why did they come?
2. **Special Assignment:** Discuss the significance of the first day of the week, naming at least three things that happened on that day.

Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb

On the first day of the week some ladies came to the tomb. Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (see notes on Matt. 27:61). The other Mary was the mother of James and Joses (Mark 16:1). Also present were Salome (Mark 16:1) and Joanna and other women (Luke 24:10). They may have come in different groups arriving at slightly different times, having agreed to meet at the tomb. This may explain different details in the accounts.

Their purpose was to see the tomb. Other accounts add that they wanted to anoint the body with spices they had brought (Mark 16:1). The body had been hastily prepared and buried (John 19:38-41). Perhaps they wanted to make sure the job was well completed. Also John 19:42 might imply that some disciples considered this tomb to be only a temporary resting place till after the sabbath. The women might have come early so they would arrive before Joseph came to move the body to another tomb elsewhere.

Mary was the first to arrive at the tomb, but by the time she arrived the stone had already been removed.

See notes on Matt. 28 regarding how time was measured and the time when various events occurred. What is stated is that, however time was accounted, Jesus was raised on the first day of the week and on that day He first began to appear to disciples. This definitely was the third day since He had been crucified (Luke 24:1,13-21).

Comparing the various accounts it seems that the women came on the morning of the first day of the week, as the sun was just appearing, but while it was still shadowy and “dark” in the garden and hilly areas, making it hard to see distinctly. Perhaps Mary Magdalene hastened ahead of the other women and arrived before the sun was up (while “it was still dark”), whereas the main body of the group arrived later after the sun had appeared. (Note “we” in v2, indicating others had been there too.) Or, perhaps the language means that Mary “went to the tomb” while it was still dark, referring to the time when she left her house. But by the time she arrived, the sun may have risen.

Significance of the First Day of the Week

Mark 16:9 — Jesus arose on the first day of the week. The resurrection of Jesus is in many ways the greatest event in the history of the world. We are nowhere directly told what day of the week Jesus died, but all four gospel accounts tell us Jesus arose on the first day of the week, and all of them mention it repeatedly. Why this emphasis on the first day unless there is some significance to it? (Luke 24:1,4,21; Mk. 16:2; Matt. 26:1-7; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-10; see also the verses under the following points.)

John 20:19 — Jesus first appeared to the disciples on the first day of the week. The appearances of Jesus are also crucial to our faith because by them He proved to the world He really is the Son of God (Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:1-8). On that same first day of the week on which He arose, He appeared several times to different groups of people (Mark 16:2,9; Matt. 26:1,8-10; Luke 24:1,19-21; John 20:1,11-19).

John 20:26 — The second day on which Jesus appeared to disciples was the next first day of the week. Again we are told the disciples came together. This was the eighth day after the first appearances. The way days were counted would make this the next first day of the week (cf. Lev. 23:39).

Acts 2:1 — The day of Pentecost was a first day of the week (Lev. 23:15,16). The disciples were gathered on this day, and the Holy Spirit came to their meeting. As a result many assembled together, the gospel was preached, and 3000 were baptized. On this first day of the week: (1) The Holy Spirit came. (2) The gospel was preached for the first time. (3) The first people were converted and became Christians. (4) The church began (cf. v47).

Acts 20:7 — The disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. This may be the only time the Lord’s supper is directly mentioned on the first day of the week, but it is certainly not the only passage that shows the first day of the week is significant.

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 — The churches took up collections each first day of the week. This does not directly mention the Christians assembling, but that is surely the reasonable conclusion.

Many of the greatest events in the history of the church occurred on the first day of the week. And of the occasions referring to the first day of the week, four of them describe Christians assembling on the first day of the week, and a fifth surely implies assembling. How can anyone doubt God’s emphasis of special significance for the first day of the week?

By contrast, note the complete absence of any real significance attached to the seventh day of the week regarding these events or any other important events during this time. Jesus came again to life and appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week, giving great joy and hope. But on the seventh day He was still in the tomb, still dead, while His disciples wept and grieved. The seventh day lacked any significance but was a time only of depression and sorrow.

Verse 2

3. To whom did Mary first report what she had seen, and what did she say?

Mary runs to report to Peter and John.

Mary apparently did not enter the tomb as did the women who came later (in Matthew's account); or if she entered, the angel did not appear to her. Most likely, seeing the stone removed, the women agreed that the main group of them would remain at the tomb, while Mary ran to tell Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved (obviously referring to John – see on John 21:20-24). While she was gone, the angel appeared to the other women.

Having found Peter and John, Mary reported that the Lord had been removed from the tomb and she did not know where they had laid Him. Apparently she thought the Jews had removed the body or perhaps Joseph or some other disciples had removed it for some purpose.

Note that the term “we” implies Mary was not alone at the tomb, which agrees with the other accounts. Further, Mary definitely left the tomb before the others did because the others saw the angels and were told that He had risen and they should tell the disciples the news. Mary did not say He had been raised but seemed confused where He might be.

Verses 3-5

4. What did these disciples do? Who arrived first?

5. What was done by the disciple who arrived first, and what did he see?

Peter and John run to the tomb.

Peter and John then ran to the tomb to see for themselves. John ran faster, arrived first at the tomb, looked inside, but hesitated to go in. He saw the linen clothes there. Remember that John is the writer so this information is first-hand personal testimony.

Verses 6,7

6. What did Peter do when he arrived? (Think: In what way was this typical of Peter?)

7. Describe what they saw in the tomb. (Think: In what way does this indicate Jesus was alive again, rather than the body being moved by other people?)

8. **Application:** What connection does the author of the book have to this event, and why is this important?

Peter and John enter the tomb.

When Peter arrived, however, true to form, he went right into the tomb to examine it. The linen cloths were lying in one place and the napkin that had surrounded the head was folded and laid separately from the other grave clothes.

This would indicate Jesus had left alive, under His own power. If any man, friend or foe, had stolen the body (as the Jews claimed), they would surely not have removed the grave clothes, let alone taken the time to fold the head cloth. Remember, the tomb was guarded by the soldiers left by the Jews to prevent the removal of the body. Anyone who took the body would be in great haste. To remove the grave clothes would take too much time and would have left them with a naked corpse of a decaying body. Folding the head cloth would be absurd in such a case. No thief would take such time. Instead, they would have grabbed the body, grave clothes and all, and escaped as quickly as possible.

Further, these details demonstrate the power of observation of the witnesses. They are good witnesses and were not so hectic they could not observe details.

Verses 8-10

9. In what way were the disciples still confused (v9)? (Think: Why were they confused?)
10. Where did they go from there?

John also entered the tomb, but He and Peter were confused about what had happened.

After Peter entered the tomb, then John entered and saw for himself what Peter had seen. Again, this is first-hand testimony from the author. He then believed. This must mean he believed Jesus was gone, but v9 shows they did not understand that He had risen from the dead.

The disciples then left to go to their homes, confused and unsure about the turn of events.

Note that, presumably the other women had gone into the tomb and seen the angels there during the time that Mary had run to find Peter and John (no telling how far she had to go to find them). By the time they arrived at the tomb, the angels had appeared to the other women and had told them to go tell the disciples that Jesus had been raised. Then the angels left. While the women were gone, Peter and John arrived and entered the tomb as described here. Then Mary herself returned and Jesus subsequently appeared to her as the account proceeds to record. There may be other explanations for the various records, but this seems as reasonable as any.

Verses 11-13

11. What did Mary see in the tomb, and where were they?
12. What question did they ask Mary, and how did she answer?

The appearance to Mary Magdalene – vv 11-18

Mary was also at the tomb. She had apparently followed Peter and John back, probably more slowly since she had run to find them. She was also weeping, so clearly she did not yet understand He had been raised, else she would have been rejoicing.

But she looked into the tomb and saw something that apparently Peter and John had not seen. There were two angels, dressed in white, sitting where Jesus had lain, one at the head and the other at the feet.

They asked her why she was weeping and she explained that she did not know where they had taken her Lord.

We are not told why the angels had not appeared to Peter and John. Perhaps Jesus wanted to personally appear to them. They were to be eyewitnesses, chosen to bear the testimony, so perhaps it was best if they first saw Him personally.

Verses 14,15

13. Whom did she see next and what did He ask her?
14. Who did she think it was, and what did she say? (Think: Why might she not have recognized Him?)

Jesus appears to Mary.

Then Mary turned around and saw Jesus Himself standing there, though she did not recognize Him. We are not told why she did not recognize Him. It may have still been somewhat shadowy in the early morning in the garden, she had tears in her eyes which would blur her vision, and she was certainly not expecting to see Jesus - she thought He was dead! V16 also indicates that she did not yet turn to look directly at Him.

So Jesus asked why she was crying and for whom she was seeking. The questions got her attention, but perhaps they also were intended to lead to the fact that she had no reason to weep (cf. Luke 24:5).

Mary thought He might be the gardener, so she asked Him if He had removed the body. If so, she would go and find it and take it away. Obviously she still though she was looking for a dead body, not the living Son of God.

Verses 16-18

15. What did He say next, and how did she indicate that she recognized Him then?
16. What did Jesus tell Mary not to do and why? (Think: What did this mean?)
17. What did He tell Mary she should do, and what did she do? (Think: What observations do you have about this first appearance of Jesus and about whom He appeared to?)

Mary recognizes Jesus.

Jesus then simply called her name. No gardener would have done so. Perhaps the tone was familiar. In any case, she turned directly to Him, recognized Him, and called Him “Rabboni” (teacher).

He told her not to cling to Him. “Cling” (Gk. *απτω*) is translated “touch” (ASV). But Vine says it means: “primarily, to fasten to ... (b) to cling to, lay hold of, John 20:17...”

Vine thinks Jesus said this because He did not want Mary to think she needed continued physical contact with Him but would have fellowship with Him by faith. Thayer thinks the point is that she did not need to physically touch Him to know He had been raised. This latter explanation is nonsense, however, because later He urged people to touch Him so they could know He had been raised (v26ff).

“Clinging” carries the idea of a prolonged holding, as to detain someone. Perhaps the point is that He did not want her to stay there at length rejoicing in the fact He had appeared to her. Instead she had other things to do (go tell the disciples), and perhaps He had other things to do too.

Jesus gave an express reason why she should not cling to Him: He had not yet ascended to the Father. Perhaps the idea was that she should not try to hold on to Him as to keep Him here on earth (see Matt. 28:9). The disciples had been so determined that He would set up an earthly kingdom that, now He had been raised, they might not realize that He still had to leave them again to ascend to His Father. They might try to keep Him on earth as king. They needed to realize they could not so cling to Him, but had to let Him go back to the Father. Or perhaps He is just reassuring her that He would remain among them a while before He ascended to the Father, so she did not need to worry that He might immediately disappear again.

Jesus had told Mary to go tell the disciples that He had appeared to her, so she did as He had told her to.

Harmony of the accounts

Mark 16:9 agrees that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. Obviously this account in John records that first appearance. But Matthew 28:9,10 seems to indicate that Jesus appeared to the women as they went to tell the disciples the message given them by the angels (though perhaps He appeared to them after they had told the disciples of the angels). Yet clearly the appearance to Mary occurred after she had told Peter and John. This may seem to be a contradiction, but there is no real problem if a period of time elapsed between Matt. 28:8 and 9.

Perhaps when Mary first saw the tomb (arriving a little ahead of the others), she left the group and ran to find Peter and John. The other women went to investigate the tomb, saw the angels, and received the message. Mary meantime had found Peter and John and brought them to the tomb. They arrived after the other women had seen the angels and left (by another route). When Peter and John had looked around and left, then Jesus appeared to Mary. After Mary left, Jesus transported Himself (as He could apparently do quite quickly) to appear to the other women who were still on the road elsewhere. The women, followed closely by Mary, found the disciples and reported what they had seen.

This brings up another question. Luke 24:12 says Peter went to the tomb *after* all the women had reported having seen the angels. Perhaps this means that Peter *returned* to the tomb a second time. He went the first time when Mary said the stone was removed, as recorded by John. But when the women said they had seen angels who said He had been raised, then he went back a second time. This would not be unlike Peter and would, in fact, be a perfectly reasonable thing to do under the circumstances. The first time at the tomb, he did not know about the claim of angels and the resurrection. It would be reasonable to check again after he had heard further information. Perhaps he even hoped that the angels would still be there so he could see them too. Perhaps this is even when Jesus did appear to Him (Luke 24:35 and 1 Cor. 15:5, though v24 makes this doubtful).

Still another possibility is that the women remained in the general vicinity of the tomb (maybe even searching the area for information about where the body was) till after Peter and John had left. Then Mary saw the angels and, still separated from the group, saw Jesus. Meanwhile, the other women returned to the tomb and saw the angels, who told them to give the message of the resurrection to the apostles. Then as they went, Jesus appeared to them all.

The First Appearance to the Disciples – 20:19-25

Verses 19,20

18. What happened that evening? (Think: What day of the week was it still?)

19. What did Jesus show them, and what was the significance of this?

20. How did the disciples feel when they saw Jesus, and what commission did He give them (vv 20,21)? (Think: Put yourself in the disciples' place. How would these appearances affect you?)

Jesus appears to the apostles.

Later, on the same day (the first day of the week), the disciples were assembled and the doors were shut because they feared the Jews. Their Master had been killed and they did not know when they might be pursued next. They had anticipated that He would lead them in rebellion against the Romans and would set up an earthly kingdom. Peter had even used His sword against those who arrested Him. On the night before His arrest and crucifixion Jesus had warned them of coming persecution. Now they had no idea what the authorities might do to them.

Nevertheless, despite the closed doors, Jesus suddenly appeared in the midst. The implication is that this was a miracle that He entered the room which was closed (and by implication locked) to prevent their being taken by surprise by the authorities. He greeted them with a message of peace. Perhaps this was to keep them from being overly upset, when they were so afraid of attack, that One whom they considered dead would so suddenly appear in their midst.

Jesus then showed them His hands and feet, and they were glad. This shows the factual nature of these appearances. They were not hallucinations or dreams. The witnesses were able to personally observe the body and the marks that proved it to really be Jesus. This also demonstrates that it was a physical resurrection, not just some spiritual phenomenon. It completely refutes the false claims of all who deny the resurrection or who claim Jesus never came in the flesh or never arose in the flesh.

God has always been a God of evidence. Throughout John's record he has given proof on which to base our faith. We are not expected to accept the claims of Jesus as being valid on the basis of speculation, opinion, or "blind faith." Remember also that John was a first-hand witness at all these events.

Note that John again emphasizes that this day was the first day of the week, and that it was the same day that the other events occurred. Hence, without doubt, Jesus arose on the first day of the week and began appearing alive from the dead on that day. If the first day is not significant but we are really supposed to be observing today the seventh-day Sabbath as some teach,

why did nothing significant happen on the seventh day but we are repeatedly and specifically told that major events happened on the first day of the week? (See notes above on v1.)

Verses 21-23

21. In v22 what did Jesus say the apostles would receive and what could they do as a result?
22. When did they actually receive the Holy Spirit? Check cross-references and give proof.
23. Study other verses (like Mark 16:15,16; Acts 1:8) and explain how men's sins are retained or forgiven. (Think: What did this have to do with the Holy Spirit and with the apostles?)
24. **Case Study:** Roman Catholicism uses this passage to claim that their priests have the power to directly forgive other men's sins. Study other **passages** and discuss how you would reply (note Mark 2:7-12; Acts 8:22; 1 Timothy 2:5,6; etc.).

Jesus sends them on a mission for which the Holy Spirit would guide them.

The Father had sent Jesus into the world with a mission. He was likewise sending them on a mission (see 17:18). This was no doubt part of, or related to, the giving of the Great commission. See notes on Matt. 28:18ff and cf. Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47-49.

To fulfill the work Jesus wanted them to do, the apostles would need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus breathed on them and said for them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Some think they received the Holy Spirit right then, but why would this be the necessary meaning of the language? "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" simply means that He intended for them to receive it. When they would receive it is not stated. Why not rather take all that is stated in other passages about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them?

In His appearance to them in Acts 1:3-8, He told them to tarry in Jerusalem till they received the Holy Spirit before they began their preaching work. Acts 1:5 said they would receive the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem "not many days from now." Luke's account of the great commission expressly told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem till the power came from on high. Jesus also told them (in the other gospel accounts) to go into all the world and preach the gospel. But they did not go right then. They went after the Holy Spirit came on them on Pentecost in Acts 2.

In John 21 He told Peter to "Feed my lambs." But no one takes that statement to mean that Peter did this immediately. It was an instruction to prepare Peter for what his later role would be. Furthermore, He here said that they would retain or forgive of sins (v23), but that was not done immediately.

Jesus is here simply preparing them for the work He intended them to do, and He gives some information they would need to do the work. The actual accomplishment of these things came after He was gone. He here speaks of the purpose of His New Testament, which began to be preached when the Holy Spirit did come on them in Acts 2.

Why then did He breathe on them? It was probably a visual aid to demonstrate the fact that they would eventually receive the Holy Spirit. It was symbolic to show the Spirit would come from Him to come upon them. But nothing here or anywhere before Acts 2 indicates they received the Holy Spirit or that the Spirit did anything through them before Acts 2. See Luke 24:49; Acts 1:3-8.

Forgiving or retaining sins

Jesus told them, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." How was this done? Note that the passage does not here define how it was done. But they were told that it would be done by the guidance of the Holy Spirit which they would receive.

Not a special priesthood with power to directly forgive sin

Nothing here says that priests in the Catholic Church have the power to directly forgive sins, as the Catholic church claims. Such would contradict other teachings elsewhere.

Mark 2:7-12 says only God can forgive sins. No man has the power to do so.

“The words ‘priest,’ ‘priesthood’ ... are never applied in the New Testament to the office of the Christian ministry. All Christians are priests (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Apoc. 5:10)” — *Catholic Dictionary*, p. 692. This is the admission of an official Catholic reference work and, in this, they teach the truth taught in the Scriptures they cite. The consequence of this admission is that, in the New Testament, there was no special priesthood to confess sins to!

Acts 8:22; Matthew 6:12 – All Christians can pray to God through Christ for forgiveness of their own sins.

James 5:16 – This passage is sometimes cited as authority for confession to a priest. But it says any righteous man (not some special priestly class) can pray for the sins of another Christian. And praying is as far as we can go. Neither this nor any other passage says humans can actually forgive sins committed against God.

1 Timothy 2:5,6 – Jesus is the only mediator between us and God. He mediates because He died as our ransom. If priests could forgive sins, then they too would mediate between us and God in forgiveness. But they cannot do so, because they are not the one Mediator, and because they did not die for us.

Sins forgiven or retained by man’s response to the gospel message

Other passages explain how the apostles forgave or retained sins. They were empowered by the Spirit to preach the terms of forgiveness when they preached the gospel - Mark 16:15,16. The promise in Acts 1:8 says that the Spirit would guide them, so they would be Jesus’ witnesses. This was the mission on which Jesus was about to send them (v21), as abundantly testified by the other accounts of the Great Commission and by Acts 1 (see on v21 above).

This is exactly the work the apostles did as revealed in the book of Acts, beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2:4,14-41,47). The Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. They proclaimed the terms under which people’s sins could be forgiven. When people obeyed the gospel, the sins were forgiven. When they refused to obey, they were “condemned” — their sins were retained. The response of the people determined whether or not they actually received the forgiveness God offered. And there is surely no indication the apostles could pass on to future generations any power to forgive sins.

The Second Appearance of Jesus to the 12 — 20:24-29.

Verses 24,25

25. Who was not present when Jesus first appeared to the apostles? What did he say?

Thomas insists that he must personally witness Jesus’ hands and side.

For some unexplained reason, the apostle Thomas had not been present on that first day when Jesus had been raised and had appeared to the other disciples. They told him about what had happened, but he refused to believe. He said he had to see for himself and personally examine the print of the nails and spear before he would believe.

We may criticize Thomas for being a “doubter,” yet it is to our advantage that he did so. Because of him we have been given another account of overwhelming evidence that Jesus really arose. He also demonstrates that the disciples were not gullible people easily fooled by an impostor. They were skeptical, and were convinced only after adequate evidence was given.

The case of Thomas also demonstrates the value of being present when God’s people meet. For whatever reason he had not been present, he demonstrates that there are many blessings missed when we do not come to be with God’s people when they meet.

Verses 26,27

26. When and how did Jesus appear next? (Think: What day of the week would that be?)
27. What did He tell Thomas to do? (Think: What does this show about Jesus' crucifixion?)

Jesus offers Thomas direct evidence.

Eight days later the disciples were again assembled. Note that this would again be on a first day of the week, according to the common way of counting says (cf. Lev. 23:39). The doors were again shut, but this time Thomas was present.

Note that this event again occurred on a first day of the week, we are expressly again told the time, and the disciples were again assembled on this day. They were already meeting on this special day of the week. And whatever their reason for meeting on this day, Jesus clearly chose to honor their meeting on that day with His presence. We are expressly told the day on which they met, and we are expressly told that Jesus chose to meet with them on that day. The evidence mounts that the first day of the week, not the seventh day, is the special day of significance to Christians.

Jesus appeared as before, and directly gave Thomas the opportunity to see the holes in his hands and the hole in his side. Note that this shows clearly that Jesus' crucifixion did involve nails being driven into His hands. It also, as stated on v20, proves beyond doubt that Jesus really was raised and that His resurrection was literal and physical. See also 1 John 1:1; Luke 24:39,40.

Note also, once again, that Jesus did not hesitate to give honest people the evidence they need to be convinced of the historical fact of those great miracles which are fundamental to our faith. The miracles are forcefully stated as historical fact, and these historical facts are deliberately and openly presented as evidence on which to base our faith. Having given Thomas the evidence, Jesus directly urges him to believe – that states the purpose for giving the evidence (cf. vv 28-31). We should not be ashamed of basing our faith on Bible accounts of miracles, especially the resurrection. They were written for that very purpose.

It is interesting that Jesus obviously knew that Thomas had earlier stated his doubts, though Jesus had not been there when Thomas made the statement. This too should have given Thomas some evidence.

And finally note that Jesus challenged Thomas to be a believer, not a disbeliever. Those who do not believe in the resurrection are “unbelieving” (“faithless” - KJV). They may claim to be Christians, disciples, or followers of Jesus. They may preach from the pulpits of “Christian” denominations or teach in “Christian” seminaries. But Jesus Himself states that, so long as they do not acknowledge the truth of the resurrection, they are “faithless.” They are not just honest skeptics. They are “unbelievers.” They are not Christians, regardless of their claims. Cf. Romans 10:9,10.

Verse 28

28. How did Thomas respond to Jesus? (Think: What does this mean about Jesus' nature?)

Thomas confesses Jesus to be “Lord and God.”

The evidence was so convincing that Thomas was convinced. He called Jesus “my Lord and my God.” He recognized Jesus as his Ruler (master) and as Deity. He did not confess Jesus to be just a good man, a great teacher, a prophet, and lawgiver. He was God in the flesh (see notes on John 1:1ff). This is the conclusion to which John seeks to bring all of His readers.

This passage unquestionably confirms Jesus' Deity. If Jesus was not God, it would have been absolutely blasphemous for Him to allow Thomas to use such terminology and not rebuke Him

for it. But instead of rebuking Thomas, Jesus said everybody else should believe the same thing (v29)!

In other passages people have mistakenly honored mere humans by giving them names or other expressions of honor that apply only to Deity. This is always forbidden (Acts 10:25,26; 12:20-23; 14:11-16; Rev. 22:8,9). For Jesus to have accepted these terms from Thomas without objecting would have been sinful **unless** He is Deity.

In an attempt to evade the force of John 1:1, some people argue that the reference there to Jesus as “God” does not have the definite article. Such an argument is not valid, since θεος without the article often is used for God (see notes on John 1:1). Yet here in this passage the expression most definitely has the article (ὁ θεος) and is clearly used for Jesus. It follows that those who make this argument on John 1:1 must acknowledge that the use of the article with θεος must refer to true Deity, and here that very phrase is used for Jesus. If they still do not accept the fact that the gospel teaches Jesus possesses true Deity, they are without excuse.

In making this statement, Thomas demonstrates the absolute necessity, not just of believing who Jesus is, but also of confessing Jesus. Confession of Jesus has ever been a defining condition of discipleship. Those who believe must confess (see on John 11:27). Those who will not confess, cannot be saved even if they do believe (John 12:42,43). Cf. Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 11:27; 12:42,43; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15.

Verse 29

29. What did Jesus say about other people believing as Thomas did?

30. **Special Assignment:** List other Bible examples in which mere men accepted honors that should be given only to God. If Jesus was not God, what should He have said to Thomas?

Jesus pronounces a blessing on all who believe.

Thomas had believed because he was able to personally observe the evidence. He personally and physically saw and touched Jesus. However Jesus knew that many people later (including all of us today) would not have that same opportunity, yet they still should believe in Him. Faith is conviction that does not have personal first-hand experience as its basis (Heb. 11:1; 2 Cor. 5:7; 1 Peter 1:8).

Many today demand similar evidence to what Thomas had. They insist they must have some miracle or some personal experience in order for them to believe. Jesus is clearly saying that such will not occur. People who demand miracles today or other physical evidence are here informed they will not receive such.

This does not mean, however, that there is no evidence at all. Thomas had no advantage in personally seeing Jesus. The difference is in the **kind** of evidence. John immediately proceeded to state that we **do** have evidence for our faith. It is the evidence of eyewitness testimony in the word. Religion differs from experimental science, not in that the latter is true and the former is not, but only in the nature of the evidence.

But once again note carefully that God does give us the evidence we need. It is today in the form of eyewitness testimony. But Jesus expressly says that we must believe about Him just as Thomas did. The blessing that Jesus pronounces here, and all the spiritual blessings of the gospel, are only for those who truly believe.

Verses 30,31

31. What was the purpose of Jesus' miracles? (Think: How did the nature of Jesus' appearances after His resurrection help accomplish this purpose?)
32. Why did John write his record of Jesus' miracles?
33. What is the value of the written word? (Think: Do we need miracles/prophets now?)

The signs that convince us to believe are now written in Scripture.

Here John plainly states what is unquestionably the theme of his book. He did not intend to record all of Jesus' miracles (see 21:25). But he did record enough to produce faith in the heart of any honest person. The resurrection of Jesus is just one of the proofs John gave, but it is surely one of the most important and convincing.

The theme of John's book is to provide evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This faith is essential in order for us to have eternal life, and the written evidence given by Divine inspiration is sufficient to produce that faith. John emphasizes again that we must have this faith to receive eternal life. God gives the evidence, but we must accept it as true to be saved.

What more could we want than what we have in the Scriptures? Some insist that they need to personally witness a miracle in order to believe. John and Jesus here expressly deny such a need. Jesus said we can and must believe without seeing direct proof, like Thomas saw (v29). In the time when miracles were being done by inspired men, people had the right to expect miracles as evidence. But that was before the message had been written, with its eyewitness testimony of confirming miracles. Now that we have the written word, it is sufficient to give us the evidence we need to believe (Romans 10:17).

Furthermore, we do not need modern prophets to repeat the message. We have in the inspired Scriptures all that we need to know to serve God and receive eternal life (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3). Contrary to those who seek modern-day spiritual gifts, the written message is adequate to produce faith to lead to eternal life. To claim that something more is needed is to contradict John's expressed purpose. The **written word** is adequate.

And once again we have a Divinely inspired statement that miracles were done and written to produce faith. God knows we need evidence and He has openly and abundantly provided it. No religious faith besides the gospel of Jesus has such convincing evidence that it is a valid revelation from God. Whether or not any specific individual actually receives eternal life will be determined by whether or not he is honest enough to investigate and accept the evidence provided.

A Summary of the People to Whom Jesus Appeared

Why did Jesus appear to people after His resurrection? It was obviously to prove that He really had been raised. He had said He would do it. Having done it, He used this means to produce many eyewitnesses to testify that He had done it.

God is a God of evidence. He gives us proof on which to base our faith. He wanted witnesses to testify of the resurrection, so Jesus appeared to many to qualify them to bear testimony to us and to the world that Jesus really is the Son of God as attested by the resurrection. See 1 Cor. 15:1-8; Acts 1:3, 20-26; 2:22-36; 10:36-43; 17:30,31; John 20:26-31; etc.

Here is a brief summary of the people to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection:

- 1) Mary Magdalene — Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18
- 2) The women — Matt. 28:8-10
- 3) Two disciples on the road to Emmaus — Luke 24:13-35
- 4) The 11 apostles — Matt. 27:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:5,7; John 20:19-21:25; Acts 1:3-11
- 5) Joseph and Matthias — Acts 1:20-26
- 6) Peter — 1 Cor. 15:5
- 7) 500 brethren at once — 1 Cor. 15:6
- 8) James — 1 Cor. 15:7

9) Paul — 1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:1ff; 22:1ff; 26:1ff

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